

JOHN GLAS: HIS LATER LIFE AND WORK

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I

IN March, 1730, after a protracted process in the Ecclesiastical Courts, John Glas,¹ Minister of Tealing, was finally deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland. This enforced separation involved a great change in his fortunes and position. At the early age of 34 he found himself cut off from the Church of his fathers and deprived not only of his source of income, but also of the social prestige which he had enjoyed as a clergyman of the National Church. He was now regarded as a heretic and schismatic, the leader of a small and despised sect. In later years, after the heat of controversy had abated, he regained the respect of his contemporaries who, while still disapproving his peculiar views and practices, appreciated his personal character, and it is pleasing to note that some of his former opponents showed him much kindness. But at the outset Glas met with social ostracism and bitter hostility. Many of his supporters withdrew their connection, and it seemed as if the tide of his popularity had definitely turned. In March, 1730, Robert Wodrow wrote: "It's thought that this determination of the Commission will weaken Mr. Glasses party in Angus, and put an end to the divisions of the country."² Two months later he could say, "He is sinking much in Angus since his deposition."³

For a short time Glas continued to minister to his little society in Tealing where worship was regularly held each Sabbath and the Sacrament dispensed once a month.⁴ Week-day meetings were also held in Dundee at the house of Bailie George Lyon. But before long Glas decided to remove his abode to Dundee which now became the centre of the first Glasite Church. Here Glas spent the major part of his long ministry.

¹ For an account of the earlier life of Glas and the process against him see *Records*, Vol. VI, 115-137.

² *Analecta*, IV, 111.

³ *Ibid.*, IV, 135.

⁴ The Communion vessels, inscribed "This belongs to the Congregational Church at Tealing, 1730," are preserved in the Glasite Meeting-house, Ashley Street, Glasgow.

With the exception of short pastorates in Edinburgh and Perth, Dundee enjoyed his special interest and care. In the early days he and his family were in straitened circumstances, but friends saw that their temporal necessities were supplied. Later Glas supported himself by keeping a book-shop, which was afterwards handed over to his son Thomas.

Shortly after Glas's settlement in Dundee it was decided to form separate churches in places where there were companies of sympathizers, but the difficulty was to secure elders or pastors. So far the only ordained minister attached to Glas was Francis Archibald, formerly Minister of Guthrie. The problem was solved as the result of a dispute which arose in the church at Dundee during the temporary absence of Mr. Glas. The question was raised whether the Communion could be observed without the presence of the pastor. Although the membership included men who had held the office of elder in the National Church, certain members maintained that as these brethren were only ruling elders they were not qualified to dispense the Sacrament. Others replied, "Have we not Elders, and is it not their office to feed the flock, by dispensing the ordinances, as well as by the doctrine?" So acute became the disputation that it threatened to disrupt the fellowship. Ultimately, two brethren, representing the divergent points of view, were deputed to confer immediately with Mr. Glas who was resting at Dunkeld. On their arrival Glas heard their reports, but reserved his judgment. He returned with them to Dundee, where a meeting of members was hastily gathered. The whole matter was reviewed in the light of Scripture. Various passages seemed to indicate that elders and bishops were the same officers under different names, and also that the essential qualification of an elder was that he be "apt to teach," consequently "ruling" elders who lacked this gift had no warrant from the new Testament. The majority concurred, and the decision was marked by the immediate removal of the seat hitherto occupied by the ruling elders. The obdurate dissentients were separated from the fellowship—a procedure which afterwards became very common in the Glasite societies. Further, as the New Testament contained no specific requirements for a learned ministry, it was resolved to appoint to the eldership brethren who, though not possessing academic education, were men of high character, earnest piety, and ability to teach. For several days the members met for prayer and fasting. Eventually, two brethren, James Cargill and William Scott, were chosen and ordained—the first as co-pastor with Mr. Glas at Dundee, and the second as co-pastor with Mr. Archibald at Guthrie.

No step taken by the Glasites caused more commotion or evoked more criticism and resentment than the ordination of men who possessed no educational qualifications and who followed secular occupations.

The Scottish tradition of an educated ministry seemed deliberately flouted by these erratic sectaries. Most bitter of all were the clergy who pronounced these untrained pastors and preachers "unlearned babblers." Writing to an Irish minister, Wodrow remarks, "He (Glas) is advancing tradesmen to the ministry, and turning out the soberer members of his congregation with much imperiousness, because they cannot see those gifts and qualities he, it seems, finds in the ignorant people he will make ministers of, who, they say, exceedingly expose religion in their probatory discourses."¹

In 1732 two additional elders were set apart, James Don and James Cant. The latter, at least, could not be described as an illiterate person. He was a scholar of no mean repute, well-versed in the Latin and Greek Classics, and with some knowledge of Hebrew.² The prejudice against an untrained and non-professional ministry continued to be strong. Preaching before the Synod of Angus and Mearns, John Willison inveighed against "a sect which is lately risen among us, who decry the knowledge of human arts and sciences, and of the languages, as unnecessary for gospel-ministers, and therefore make choice of illiterate men for that office." This utterance elicited a reply from Glas³ who pointed out that such a reproach came ill from a minister of a Church which had acted similarly in the case of John Gilon of Linlithgow, a minister devoid of academic qualifications.⁴ Glas further pronounces the objection irrelevant, inasmuch as the so-called "illiterate men" make no claim to be regarded as ministers of the National Church.

In 1733 a Glasite Church was formed in Perth.⁵ Mr. Glas, accompanied by a few friends, came from Dundee to attend the opening services. When the party, who had come by boat, landed at Perth they were met by a hostile crowd who pelted them with mud and various missiles. The local clergy were greatly incensed by the establishment of a schismatical conventicle in their midst, and one of their number urged the magistrates to suppress the society. This cleric preached an inflammatory sermon

¹ *Correspondence*, III, 482-483.

² James Cant was H.M. Surveyor of Customs in Perth. He edited the second edition (1774) of Henry Adamson's *The Muses' Threnodie* first published in 1638. Principal Lee describes him as "an antiquarian of great note in Perth." Cant was an elder of the Glasite Church in Perth for forty years. D. C. Smith, *The Historians of Perth*, 59 ff.

³ Works, II, 256 ff.

⁴ Vide Wodrow, *Analecta*, IV, 271.

⁵ During its long history of nearly 200 years this church had associated with it many influential citizens, including the Sandemans, the Millers, the Cants, and the Morisons.

from the text, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines ; for our vines have tender grapes." So excited were some of the hearers that they seriously proposed to burn down the place of meeting. Only the intervention of Mr. George Miller, the Town Clerk, deterred them from violence.

The church in Edinburgh was formed in 1734, in which year Mr. Glas left Dundee to take the oversight of the newly-established cause. It was in connection with this church that Robert Sandeman, then a youth of sixteen, who had come to study at Edinburgh, made his profession and identified himself with Glas's movement. This decision changed Sandeman's outlook and prospects. It had been intended that he should prepare either for the ministry or for the medical profession, but after one or two sessions at Edinburgh he returned to Perth, and later entered into partnership with his brother William as a linen-manufacturer.¹

The accession of Robert Sandeman proved an event of great importance for it was chiefly through his influence and labours that the Glasite movement spread to England, Wales, and America. Though Glas was the initiator of the movement, it was Sandeman who made it a force to be reckoned with in the religious world of the Eighteenth Century. Without his powerful advocacy and indomitable energy, the opinions of Glas might never have attracted much attention or his societies have continued for any length of time.² At the age of nineteen Sandeman married Glas's eldest daughter, Catherine, and seven years later (1744) he was ordained an elder of the Perth Church. In order to devote himself more fully to his duties he retired from business.

Meanwhile, in 1736 and the early part of 1737, Glas himself had been resident in Perth as an elder of the church. Prejudice against him was

¹ William Sandeman was an elder in the church at Perth for many years. His daughter, Sibella, became the wife of Robert Boswell, W.S., a cousin of the famous James Boswell.

² It may seem strange that Glas's attempt to re-introduce Independency into Scotland received no support from Congregationalists in England. An autograph letter, dated 23rd July, 1737, addressed by Glas to Mr. Alex. Forrest, care of Dr. Isaac Watts, at the Lady Abney's at Newington near London, throws some light on the aloofness of the English Independents. Shortly after the formation of the first Glasite churches, one of Glas's principal supporters, without his approval, wrote to Dr. Watts soliciting the interest and help of Independent ministers, but the approach was coldly received. Glas writes : "Then they seemed more afraid of their own honour as they stand in connexion with the Presbyterians, and of the loss of their good Name with the Church of Scotland to which they profess'd the highest regard ; and indeed plainly shewed themselves to be more acted by this fear than by the Fear lest the meanest appearance of the Cause of Christ, and Christian Liberty should suffer." He adds that he is now thankful that he and his friends had been preserved from any association with the English Independents.

still strong, and he was subjected to many petty annoyances. When Mrs. Glas opened a shop difficulties were placed in the way by the civic authorities. Complaint was made that the shop was kept open on local Fast-days and other occasions appointed by the Kirk-session of Perth. Glas claimed not only the right to engage in lawful trade, but also freedom from conformity to the rules laid down by the National Church for its own members.¹

During his stay in Perth Glas was approached with a view to the pastorate of a vacant congregation in Sunderland, but did not see his way to consider the proposal favourably.² In 1737, however, he returned to his old charge in Dundee, devoting himself to the care of his flock, though always ready to help any church in need. He also spent much time and labour in literary work, for most of his theological treatises and pamphlets were produced between 1737 and 1759.

II

For several years Glas's movement made little progress, but in 1738 it received a notable recruit in the person of Mr. George Byres, Minister of Lessuden (St. Boswells), Roxburghshire.³ Although several ministers of the Church of Scotland had corresponded with Glas on religious questions, Mr. Byres was the first clergyman after Francis Archibald to resign his living and join the Glasite denomination. After his secession from the National Church he served as an elder in the Edinburgh church

¹ An unpublished document in Glas's handwriting reveals how keenly he felt the opposition of the civic authorities. "I had no reason to question my right to trade in Lawfull merchandise in this Town where I had marry'd the Daughter of Mr. Thomas Black, minister of the Gospel, a Burges of this Burgh still residing here and afterward I myself had been made Burges & Gild Brother by a Ticket granted to me on the 30 day of March 1721 without any Reference to any such act as should make it void thro' my not residing in the Place. . . . I could not impute this great change of Behaviour in the Town of Perth toward me & my Family to any Thing else but the change that the word of God has made on my Profession in Religion & my circumstances in the world."

² On March 16, 1737, Glas writes: "I had a letter this Winter from Mr. John Cranstoun, Minister of the Congregational Church in Newcastle, informing that there is a People in Sunderland not far from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, wanting a Minister, and wanting to know if I or Mr. Archibald could be prevail'd on to go there. I suppose Mr. Archibald means not to go, and as for our churches they cannot spare an Elder anywhere." Unpublished correspondence.

³ Byres succeeded his father, Geo. Byres, Senr., in 1730. He married a daughter of Gabriel Wilson, Minister of Maxton, and one of the "Marrow Brethren." Wilson opposed the deposition of Glas.

for two years, during which period his brother-in-law, a son of Gabriel Wilson of Maxton, was received into the membership. Byres afterwards ministered to a small Glasite church at Kippielaw, Bowden parish, near Melrose. He passed away in 1773 "respected to the latest period of his life by all who knew him, as an example of the virtues which distinguish the Christian."¹

In 1741 Francis Archibald relinquished his pastorate at Arbroath. He removed to Edinburgh to become Master of the Orphan Hospital. There is no further reference to him in connection with the Glasite Communion. It is probable that he died two or three years after his settlement in Edinburgh.²

One of the most far-reaching events in the history of the Glasite movement was the publication in 1757 of Robert Sandeman's *Letters on 'Theron and Aspasio,'* written in criticism of the famous work of that title by James Hervey, an Evangelical clergyman of the Church of England. It was during the decade following the publication of Sandeman's *Letters* that the movement received accessions from various denominations and that the number of churches showed the largest increase. Among those influenced by Sandeman's work was Robert Carmichael, Anti-burgher minister of Coupar-Angus. His boldness in expressing his opinions led to his citation (November 1761) before the Anti-burgher Presbytery of Perth. Refusing to retract his views, he was suspended from his ministry.³ A few days later he received from John Glas a letter inviting him to associate himself with the Glasite fellowship.⁴ As the result of an interview in Dundee Carmichael decided to adopt this course. In September, 1762, he appeared before the Anti-burgher Synod, and a few months later was deposed. The Glasites regarded Carmichael as a valuable accession, but his association with them was of short duration. In 1763, owing to a disputed case of discipline in the Glasgow church, Carmichael, along with Archibald M'Lean, withdrew his connection.⁵ Later he became pastor of the first Baptist Church in Edinburgh which was formed in 1765. Carmichael's special interest is that he carried over with him several peculiar principles and practices which gave a Glasite tinge to the "Scotch" Baptist churches both north and south of the Border.

In 1763 there seemed a likelihood of Glas removing to Edinburgh. He had expressed willingness to serve the Edinburgh church in the event

¹ Preface to Glas's *Narrative* (1828 ed.), xviii.

² Scot, *Fasti*, V, 437.

³ M'Kerrow, *History of the Secession Church*, 285-288.

⁴ *Letters in Correspondence*, 93.

⁵ W. Jones, *Memoir of Archibald M'Lean*, xxi.

of a vacancy, and now the brethren there requested the Dundee church to release Mr. Glas. Ultimately arrangements were made whereby Glas was able to remain in Dundee.

A year later (1764) the Perth church sent a call to Mr. Glas, and, despite the strong representations of the brethren in Dundee and Arbroath, Glas thought it his duty to accept the invitation. The Dundee church was the largest and strongest of the Glasite congregations. Glas's preaching attracted many interested hearers, and the quaint meeting-house in King Street was usually well-filled. These considerations were urged as reasons why Glas should remain. Further, it was said, "Now the church in Perth have often the benefit of your ministry, and we are far from grudging it; but we presume to think that we have the best title to enjoy the constant advantage of it."¹ The Arbroath brethren pointed out that Dundee was the most convenient centre from which to maintain contact with the scattered churches in Scotland. But Glas considered that Dundee was now able to spare him, and he may also have thought that his absence might prove beneficial, for there is a hint in the letter sent by the church that the chief pastor had not always received due appreciation and loyalty: "We must indeed acknowledge to our grief and sorrow that we have shown in several instances our ingratitude for all the labour and travail you have bestowed on us; we have been headstrong and obstinate, not attending to our duty as pointed out by you to us from the word of God in matters relating to the discipline."² Glas, however, determined to go to Perth where the membership was smaller and the need greater.³

There are no records of Glas's second ministry in Perth. In 1769 he returned to Dundee where the remaining four years of his life were spent. Though now an old man who had passed through many afflictions, he retained considerable vigour of body and mind. He continued to take a lively interest in the churches, corresponding frequently with them on matters of difficulty.

About three years before Glas's death another former Church of Scotland minister, Robert Ferrier⁴ of Largo, joined the Glasites. Ferrier's attention had been drawn to Glas's *Testimony of the King of Martyrs*

¹ *Letters in Correspondence*, 90.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 97. A copy of the Perth roll for 1762 contains 91 names.

⁴ Born in 1741, Robert Ferrier became assistant and successor to his father, John Ferrier, minister of Largo, in 1764. His mother, Elizabeth Johnston, was the sister of Gabriel Johnston, Governor of North Carolina prior to the American Revolution.

by a brother minister who was on his death-bed. The reading of this work shook Ferrier's attachment to the National Church. He discovered that the views of another minister, James Smith of Newburn, approximated to his own. In 1768 these two clergymen resigned their livings and published an apology for the step taken.¹ A copy of this came into the hands of Glas who made approaches to them, but Smith disliked Glas and influenced Ferrier against him.² Later Ferrier met Glas and completely lost his prejudice. He severed his connection with the Scots Independents, among whom he held office as an elder in Glasgow, and threw in his lot with Glas.³ He became an enthusiastic advocate of Glasite views, and it is largely due to his keen interest that many important facts concerning Glas and his churches have been preserved.⁴

John Glas passed away on November 2, 1773, in the 79th year of his age and the 55th of his ministry. His body was laid to rest in the Dundee burial-ground known as the "Old Howff." His tombstone describes him as "Minister of the Congregational Church in this place," and the inscription, composed by James Scott, Banker, ends with the eulogy, "His character in the Churches of Christ is well known, And will outlive all monumental inscriptions."

III

It is scarcely surprising that the estimates of Glas's personality given by friends and opponents respectively are sometimes at variance. Like most religious controversialists he has been eulogized by his admirers and belittled by his enemies. Some have accused him of a domineering spirit and represented him as an autocrat, resentful of criticism and impatient of advice. As early as 1726 Wodrow described him as one who "can bear no contradiction without running to hights."⁵ Robert Carmichael, as quoted by Glas himself, speaks of his "masterly and lordly spirit."⁶ William Jones states that he "was too fond of meddling

¹ *The Case of Mr. James Smith . . . and Robert Ferrier*, Edin. 1768.

² *Letters in Correspondence*, 25; Ferrier's Preface to *Testimony of the King of Martyrs* (edition 1777), 18 ff.

³ Ferrier's Preface, where the reasons are stated.

⁴ Ferrier married as his second wife, Catherine, daughter of Geo. Sandeman of Perth, and widow of Wm. Waterston, wax-chandler, of St. John's Hill, Edinburgh. Ferrier died in 1795.

⁵ *Analecta*, III, 357.

⁶ *Letters in Correspondence*, 83.

with the affairs of the churches in the connection.”¹ That there is some truth in these statements is borne out by a long letter addressed to Glas by James Duncan⁹ of Glasgow in March, 1771. Duncan takes him to task for having intermeddled in the affairs of the churches in Glasgow and Paisley with serious results to their welfare and unity. He frankly accuses Glas of adopting an authoritarian manner and asks, “What authority have you for meddling in the affairs of a distant church of which you cannot be a judge?” adding, “Sure I am, that should any man presume to act the same part towards the church of which you are a member, you would spurn at him with the most contemptuous disdain.”³ That Glas could be dogged and assertive is evidenced by his attitude during his trial before the Church Courts, and it may well be that he did not change in this respect with advancing years. On the other hand, Robert Ferrier, who at one time had “a most thorough contempt for him (Glas), his sentiments, and all connected with him,” a prejudice formed on reports which represented him “as an arbitrary tyrant, keeping the churches in chains under his lordly sway, so that they durst not act but according to his nod,” declares, “Justice and truth oblige me to say that I never beheld a character more the opposite of this, or one more like the little child, than Mr. Glas appeared to me, when acquainted with him.”⁴ Ferrier cites instances showing “that Mr. Glas was far from assuming authority over the Church, or opposing anything because not proposed by himself, or because it might lessen his own authority or consequence in the Church; but that whatever was proposed, which appeared to have Scripture for its foundation and warrant, immediately received his hearty support, whatever might be the self-denial it would lead to, or whoever might be its proposer.”⁵

Glas was a man who could not avoid making enemies. He was outspoken and uncompromising wherever he considered truth and principle were involved, indifferent to the world’s smile or frown. He himself remarks that he “can never pass either for a good man, or a wise man, in the place where he lives; nor indeed in any other place where riches are esteemed goodness, and where cunning, and sacrificing all things to the love of gain, are thought wisdom.”⁶

¹ *Memoir of Archibald M'Lean*, xx.

² *The Millennial Harbinger*, I (1835), 280-285. Duncan withdrew from the Glasites and became an elder of the “Scotch” Baptist Church in Glasgow.

³ *The Millennial Harbinger*, I, 282-283.

⁴ Preface, 16-18.

⁵ *Supplementary Letters*, Appendix, v.

⁶ Works, IV, 453.

There was undoubtedly an element of dourness in Glas's character, but his general disposition was genial rather than taciturn and sullen. He had a keen sense of humour and sometimes indulged in high spirits. He was a brilliant conversationalist, an entertaining companion whose visits were welcomed by his friends. In demeanour he differed from the common clerical type. His manners were free and easy, utterly devoid of professionalism. Once when rallied on his seeming levity he replied, "I too can be grave at times, when I want money or want righteousness." Glas had a genius for friendship, and delighted to share in games and innocent social diversions. His attitude towards amusements was far removed from the puritanical spirit prevalent in evangelical circles during the Eighteenth Century. He objected to making laws where Christ had not made them. He saw no harm in participation in popular recreations, or in attendance at balls, theatres, and other places of entertainment. He had a special fondness for children into whose amusements he threw himself with unaffected zest. In his family circle he was beloved as an affectionate father and friend. Among the churches of his order his influence remained undiminished, while outside his denomination he won the esteem of all who could appreciate the sincerity of his faith and the integrity of his life. The respect in which he was generally held is shown by the fact that he received the great civic honour of the freedom of Dundee.¹

IV

John Glas was a preacher and scholar of no mean order who, had he remained in the National Church, might have risen to eminence. His outstanding pulpit gifts early attracted attention. Shortly after his settlement at Tealing he was regarded as one of the most popular preachers in Angus. Many visitors from neighbouring parishes attended his church. His services were in demand on special occasions such as Communion seasons. His sermons were the fruit of careful preparation. During his first years at Tealing he wrote his discourses in full. Few of these have appeared in print,² but a number are still preserved either in the original manuscript or in copies. Glas was a systematic preacher who believed in exhausting one text before taking another. Series followed series in regular succession.³ Lengthy as these sermons were, each occupying

¹ Vide A. H. Millar, *Roll of Eminent Burgesses of Dundee*, 215-216.

² Specimens appear in *The Edinburgh Evangelical Mag.*, II (1804).

³ Between Mar. 19 and Aug. 13, 1721, Glas delivered a series of sermons based on I John iii, 2-3; between June and October, 1722, a course of twelve sermons on II Cor. v, 14-15, followed by another course of twelve on the 17th verse.

more than an hour in delivery, they were listened to with patience, for in those days the popular appetite for sermons was not easily satisfied.

Glas's discourses reflect his doctrinal views and homiletic method. His style was characteristic of the age. The sermons are marked by a minute analysis which to the modern mind appears laboured and dull. The construction is elaborate, with a multiplicity of heads, divisions, and sub-divisions, while the matter is largely theological. There is abundance of logic but little imagination, though the argument is supported by copious quotation of texts drawn from the whole range of Scripture.

In later years Glas contented himself with outlines for pulpit use. These notes also reveal deep spiritual insight, sound exegesis, and ordered thinking. His seven volumes of *Notes on Scripture Texts*, published between 1747 and 1760, compare favourably with similar productions of the time. His powers as a preacher remained undiminished to the end of his days. Describing a sermon delivered in Perth (January, 1762) James Cant writes: "Such another discourse my ears never heard. All was solid substance, and at the same time milk for the weakest babe. The meeting-house was full—he himself in a flow of spirits."

Though Glas placed little value upon academic learning as a qualification for the ministry he himself was a man of thorough education and wide erudition. His early grounding in the classics and philosophy developed his natural aptitudes and strengthened habits of mind essential to the exact student. His literary output was enormous, yet the mark of the scholar is upon all his work. The second edition of his works in five volumes (Perth, 1782-3) contains no fewer than forty items, but it does not represent all his writings. Many of these were pamphlets occasioned by the controversies of the time, but some are treatises of considerable length. He had a thorough knowledge of the sacred tongues which, coupled with deep spiritual penetration, qualified him as an interpreter of the Word. Sometimes his exegesis may appear fanciful, but often it is illuminating.

The extent of his reading is remarkable. Well versed in religious and historical literature, both ancient and contemporary, his works contain citations from the Fathers, the Reformers, the Puritans, and divines British and Continental, Protestant and Romanist.

Glas's most important work is *The Testimony of the King of Martyrs concerning His Kingdom* (1729), which was written during his early ministry at a time when controversy ran high. An elaborate exposition of our Lord's declaration, "My kingdom is not of this world," it emphasises the essentially spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom with which is bound up the spiritual independence of the Church. "Had Glas never written anything but this," says William Orme, "his name would have descended to posterity with honour, as one of the ablest biblical scholars,

and most enlightened advocates of the doctrines and kingdom of Jesus Christ. It contains none of the asperities of some of his subsequent productions, and is no less creditable to his feelings as a Christian, than to his talents as a man."¹ Another important work is his *A Treatise on the Lord's Supper* (1743)—a scholarly and beautiful study of the Eucharist in the light of Scripture and illustrated by numerous references from the Early Fathers.² Other publications deserving mention are *A View of the Heresy of Aërius* (1745), and *A Literal Translation of the True Discourse of Celsus* (1753). The Preface to the former contains some interesting autobiographical reflections, while the treatise itself is a masterly study in Church History. The second book is unique as being the first translation in English of the famous attack upon Christianity by Celsus in the Second Century. Glas seeks to reconstruct the *True Word* of Celsus from the citations in Origen's apology *Contra Celsum*, and it will stand comparison with later attempts to present the original. The notes display scholarly acumen and critical insight.

V

Glas's writings cover most of the great doctrines of the Christian Faith and the principles of Christian practice, but he never attempted to present his teaching in systematised form. It would be idle to claim that he made any great original contribution to theological thought. Most of his ideas were derived directly or indirectly from previous thinkers. "It would be no easy task," says William Jones, "to adduce a sentiment of any importance from his writings which cannot be traced to those of Dr. Owen and other Evangelical authors previous to the days of Mr. Glas."³ His general outlook was that of orthodox Calvinism. He held Calvin in high esteem as a theologian "no way equalled by those who show the greatest contempt for him in comparison with the ancients." He declares that "The Fourth century has not furnished us with any writing on divinity that can be compared with his *Institutions*."⁴ He made a careful study of the doctrines associated with the names of Calvin and Arminius, and reached the conclusion that the special tenets of Arminianism were unsupported by Scripture.⁵ But much as he admired

¹ *London Christian Instructor*, II (1819), 90-91.

² A new edition was published in 1883.

³ *The New Evangelical Magazine*, IV (1818), 300.

⁴ Works, IV, 493.

⁵ "As to the Distinction of Arminian, Calvinist, or Baxterian doctrine . . . I'm persuaded Calvin's scheme is more agreeable to the Truth of the Gospel than either of the other two." Unpublished letter dated July 23, 1737.

the Genevan Reformer he declined to accept his judgments as final and authoritative. His views on the nature of Christ's Kingdom were influenced by the teaching of Bishop Hoadly,¹ while those which he held respecting the constitution of the Church show how carefully he had studied the works of John Owen.² But Glas was not a slavish copyist of any thinker. His starting-point was the Divine revelation in the Scriptures which he maintained "contain the complete revelation of the whole counsel of God, and are the perfect rule of the Christian religion, which is still to be found pure and entire in these."³ Glas followed others only as far as he believed they followed the Word of God, and in some respects he carried the implications of their principles beyond the point at which they stopped.

Glas was quick to perceive and expose the inconsistencies of the popular theology of his day. He believed that the fundamental Christian truths had either been obscured by a super-structure of scholastic interpretation or subordinated to a shallow mysticism. He placed his emphasis upon the historic foundations of the Christian Faith. Christianity, he maintained, was not the fruit of philosophical speculation or mystical feeling, but the revealed truth of God in Jesus Christ. His view of religion is transcendental rather than immanent, hence his insistence on the objectivity of Christian truth. He suspected all claims to religious experience which rested on a purely subjective basis. To Glas the basal truth of religion is the sovereignty of God, in the light of which Christian redemption must be interpreted. "The great scope and design of the whole scripture is to raise the glory of the divine grace and mercy upon the abasement of our pride of our own merit."⁴ Salvation, which is of grace not of works, is received solely by faith which itself is the gift of God. Glas considered that the doctrine of Justification by Faith, so central in the Apostolic testimony, early became dimmed and obscured. In the Early Church there arose teachers who adulterated the Gospel, but these were only the forerunners "of that grand apostasy from the faith, under some profession of it, that was to come."⁵ Not until the days of Luther and Calvin was the long-obscured truth re-discovered. But after the Reformation was established "the first zeal for the truth abated, and nature prevailed, as it will always do in the nations of this

¹ Hoadly, *The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church of Christ*, 1717.

² Owen, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*.

³ Works, V, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 212.

⁵ Works, V, 355-356.

world.”¹ Even among professed Calvinists the doctrine had been so watered down that, in spite of differences respecting election and perseverance, Calvinists and Arminians were really at one “as to the grand point of the justification of the sinner before God,” looking for grounds of confidence from within themselves rather than from “the answer of a good conscience toward God by Christ’s resurrection, as the spring of the Christian religion,” which is the testimony of the Apostles.²

It is here that we find Glas deviating from the popular theology of his day. The difference is most clearly marked in his conception of Saving Faith as neither more nor less than belief of the truth or testimony of God concerning Jesus Christ, passively received by the understanding. Faith, he says, is not an act of the human will, but the production of the Divine Spirit. Faith has not only been confused with its concomitants or effects, but also represented in such a way as to make it a “work” or act on the part of the believer, whereas true faith is the outcome of God’s operation on the mind of the believer. The truth of the Gospel is not dependent upon a man’s inward state of feelings, but rests solely upon the Divine testimony presented to him. Glas repudiates the charge of Antinomianism and of teaching a conception of faith equivalent to the “faith of devils.” So far from undervaluing Christian conduct, he holds that the belief of the testimony, wrought in the soul by the Spirit, naturally finds expression in the graces of the Gospel. “This belief of the truth which proceeds from the new-birth, distinguishes itself by its peculiar fruits and effects,” which include all that is meant by love to God and the children of God, evidenced in obedience to the commandments, or doing good works.³

Glas’s teaching concerning Saving Faith constitutes his chief doctrinal peculiarity. His desire to exalt the truth of Sovereign Grace led him to an over-emphasis of faith as “simple belief of the testimony of the Gospel,” thereby making faith primarily the intellectual apprehension of objective revelation. He failed to see that faith has affective and volitional aspects as well as cognitive—that it is the response of the whole man as a thinking, feeling, and willing personality. He regards faith and belief as identical and interchangeable terms, and shows little or no appreciation of the various shades of meaning attached to the word “faith” by the New Testament writers. But defective as his conception of faith is, Glas rendered a service in protesting against the current tendency to identify faith with feeling, and also in emphasising the objectivity of the Christian Gospel as something *given* in and through Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word of God.

¹ Works 583.

² *Ibid.*, II, 133.

³ *Ibid.*, V, 363.

VI

Ecclesiastically Glas ranks as an Independent or Congregationalist. Dr. Lindsay Alexander states that Glas "appears as the uncompromising advocate of what would now be called Voluntaryism, and of a form of Church government even more democratic than that found among Congregationalists."¹ The latter part of this statement needs qualification. It suggests that Glas was an ultra-Independent, but such was not the case. More accurately Alexander Gordon remarks, "His principles have been described as akin to Brownism, but they approached more nearly to the type of independent presbyterianism set forth by the early Puritans, e.g. William Bradshaw (1571-1618)."² The Glasite churches represent a type of Church order which might be denominated Presbyterian Independency or Congregational Presbyterianism rather than strict Congregationalism as taught by Robert Browne and other Fathers of English Independency. Glas regarded the Eldership as of the *esse* and not merely of the *bene esse* of a Scripturally constituted church. Though he deprecated clericalism and professionalism he desired to restore within his societies a ministry which was valid and authoritative, resting solely upon the sanctions of the Word of God. Such a ministry is God's gift to His Church, invested with Divine authority to teach and rule, and it possesses functions which belong only to those specially chosen and ordained to office. A peculiar feature of Glas's doctrine of the ministry is his insistence on a plurality of elders in each congregation. He allows no difference between a teaching and a ruling elder. Without a plurality of elders constituting a congregational presbytery a church is incomplete and therefore incompetent to observe Christian ordinances and discipline. In this respect Glas's idea of the constitution of a church differs from the common form of Presbyterianism with its single pastor and lay-elders (ruling elders) constituting a Kirk-session, and from some forms of Independency which vest all government in the Church-meeting. Nevertheless Glas maintains the Congregational view of the nature of the Church. According to New Testament usage, he says, the word "Church" may be applied only to the "mystic body of Christ" and to the visible expression of that Body in a company of believers locally gathered and organised. Each congregation, under the oversight of its own presbytery, possesses the complete character of a Christian church apart from any external sanction. He contends³ that this view of the

¹ *Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography*, II, 643.

² *Dict. National Biography*, XXI, 417-418. Cf. Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, I, 287-288.

³ *Works*, I, 209, 379.

local congregation as a complete church is in harmony with the declaration of the old *Scots Confession* (1560) wherein the Scottish Reformers state that if the true notes of a church, viz., the true preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the Sacraments, and an adequate discipline, are to be found, no matter how few the number of members, there is a true church of Christ.¹ The *Scots Confession* "owns no other church but the mystical body, and a single congregation."² This view Glas believes to be the teaching of the New Testament : "I can see no churches instituted by Christ, in the New Testament, beside the universal, but congregational churches."³

Further, Glas teaches that Church and State are entirely separate institutions—that neither may trespass upon the domain of the other. As a purely spiritual society the Church has no immediate concern with questions of civil government, and the State as a civil institution has no right to exercise legislative or executive functions in the sphere of religion. Thus Glas differs not only from the standards of the Church of Scotland respecting the authority of the civil magistrate,⁴ but also from the views of the early Puritans who held that the magistrate as such had powers in religious matters.⁵ Glas's views on Church and State follow naturally from his conception of the Church as a spiritual society of believers organised in visible and local congregations. Such doctrine, however, was new and strange to Scottish ears during the first half of the Eighteenth century when Church and State were commonly regarded as the two sides of national life.

VII

The movement initiated by John Glas has long been a spent force. To-day only four small churches⁶ remain to represent the Glasite or Sandemanian connection. The Glasite body has always been one of the smallest denominations. Even in the palmiest days of the movement it is doubtful if the number of churches reached forty, or the aggregate membership (excluding adherents) exceeded one thousand. Yet this numerically insignificant body at one time caused no little stir in the

¹ *Scots Confession*, cap. xviii.

² *Works*, I, 379.

³ *Works*, I, 187.

⁴ Vide *Scots Confession*, c. xxiv. Cf. *West Conf.*, c. xxiii.

⁵ Vide Bradshaw's statement quoted in Burrage, *op. cit.*, I, 288.

⁶ Edinburgh (Barony St.), Glasgow (Ashley St.), London (Highbury Cres.), and London (Furlong Road).

religious world. During the greater part of the Eighteenth century, and for a few decades later, the works of Glas and his colleagues were widely read. Among those who joined his communion were persons of social standing and culture, including ministers of the Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, and Methodist Churches. Associated with it, directly or indirectly, were several distinguished people, the most notable being Michael Faraday,¹ the great scientist, and William Godwin.²

Glas's influence upon the leaders of later religious movements would provide an interesting study. Though rarely admitted, the Glasite movement had repercussions on Scottish Presbyterianism from the Secession to the Disruption. The increasing emphasis by the Secession and Relief Fathers on the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom reflects the position first definitely advocated by Glas. As early as 1726, while both John Glas and Ebenezer Erskine were ministers of the National Church, Erskine expressed sympathy with Glas's views on this question. In later days, after strong antipathy developed between their respective followers, the Secessionists were loth to acknowledge their indebtedness to Glas. Of the Relief Church Dr. Gavin Struthers remarks, "Some of the Fathers of the Relief have been more indebted to Glas for their views of the kingdom of Christ than what at first sight appears. They took the outlines of his system, but not his crotchets." He ventures the opinion that had the Glasites "united the suavity of the Gospel with their spiritual views of the Messiah's kingdom, there would have been little room for the Relief."³ The opponents of the Relief charged them with being "copyists of Glas." A comparison of Patrick Hutcheson's *Messiah's Kingdom* with Glas's *Testimony of the King of Martyrs* shows how closely the Relief apologist had followed Glas in his main contentions.⁴

Glas's greatest influence, however, is to be sought in a number of religious denominations, mostly small, which took their rise either towards the end of his life-time or during the half-century which followed. These were mainly Independent in Church order: the "Scotch" Baptists, the

¹ Michael Faraday was an elder in the London Church.

² William Godwin, whose association with the movement was but a passing phase of his varied career, was the son of a Dissenting minister. He himself was intended for the Independent ministry. Refused admission to Homerton Academy on account of his Sandemanian sympathies, he was accepted by Hoxton Academy. Later he broke away from organized religion, but retained the influence of Sandemanianism. Vide H. N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin, and their Circle*, 78-80; *Times Lit. Supplement*, 4th April, 1936; *The Scots Magazine*, August, 1936, 345ff.

³ *History of the Relief Church*, 179.

⁴ *Messiah's Kingdom*, 81, 171 ff. Cf. A. J. Campbell, *Two Centuries of the Church of Scotland*, 90-91.

Old Scots Independents, the Inghamites (followers of Benjamin Ingham, Wesley's early co-adjutor), the Haldaneites, the Walkerites or Irish "Separatists" (disciples of John Walker, sometime Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin), and the "Disciples" or Campbellites. Though none of these bodies accepted everything in Glas's teaching, all reproduced some features of his system.¹

VIII

How do we explain the declension of the Glasite denomination? There are several reasons, all of which show that the causes of weakness and decline are to be found in the system itself, not in any external opposition. From the outset the Glasite movement was open to all the dangers of "particularism"—the tendency of new religious movements to make the emphasis of particular aspects of truth or details of practice their supreme consideration. The Glasite body was markedly "particularist." It claimed the rediscovery of doctrinal truth and the restoration of neglected but essential practices. It stood over against other denominations as *the* one body which offered a pure and complete restoration of Primitive Christianity. Particularism tends to become narrow and dogmatic, hyper-critical and intolerant, exclusive and self-righteous, and even to glory in isolation. All these features have characterised the Glasite body and impaired its effectiveness.

Among the specific reasons for the decline of the Glasite denomination the following may be mentioned :

1. A distorted theology resulting from a defective psychology of faith. Glas's doctrine of faith as "simple belief of the testimony of the Gospel," especially as expounded and amplified by Sandeman, repelled many who felt that such a view was one-sided and cold, while his teaching concerning Assurance failed to convince the minds or satisfy the hearts of those who desired the consciousness of acceptance with God. People who acknowledged their indebtedness to Glas for his emphasis on the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom could not subscribe to the definition of faith as "bare relief of the bare truth" or accept a doctrine of assurance which failed to assure.²

¹ The Inghamites (later united with the Old Scots Independents) have a few churches; the Walkerites are extinct; the Haldaneites have merged with either Baptist or Congregational Churches; the Disciples are one of the largest denominations in America and are also represented in Britain and Australia by the "Churches of Christ."

² Towards the end of the eighteenth century the Glasite churches were rent asunder over this question of Assurance. Vide *A New Theological Dictionary* (1807), 790.

2. Excessive literalism in the interpretation of Scriptural injunctions. Glas's conception of the authority of Scripture led him to exalt the letter above the spirit and to introduce a new form of legalism. He regarded the New Testament as a code of laws and regulations which demanded absolute obedience. No practice was permissible unless it had a precedent in the primitive churches. Doctrine and conduct, organisation and order were permanently fixed. No room was left for development or modification in view of changing times or conditions. The Glasites attempted to reproduce in precise detail the order and customs of the New Testament churches. Thus they restored practices¹ which had a temporary or local significance—Love-feasts,² the Kiss of Charity, Foot-washing, and Abstinence from "Blood-eating"³—but which they regarded as permanently obligatory.

3. Severity of Discipline. The Glasite discipline was so strict that many members revolted against it or were either excommunicated or else voluntarily withdrew. Small as were the churches, they suffered constant depletion. Some members were "put away" on moral grounds, but in many instances excommunication took place on account of differences respecting points of doctrine or practice. Several of the best and most influential leaders were forced into separation. These formed new bodies, with a broader platform, and absorbed those who could not conform to the rigid system of doctrine, order, and discipline.

4. Lack of missionary enterprise. In the early days it seemed as if the movement might develop along evangelistic lines, but the increasing emphasis on matters of order tended to produce a self-contained and exclusive spirit which resulted in a policy of ecclesiastical isolation. Regarding all other bodies as corrupt, the Glasites refused to hold fellowship with them or to co-operate in support of Bible and Missionary Societies. They denied any obligation to evangelise non-Christian lands, holding (strange to say) that the New Testament lends no countenance to missionary enterprise. Similarly the Glasites have refrained from proselytism or evangelistic activities at home.

Had John Glas been content to place the supreme emphasis on the great spiritual principles with which he commenced his career he might have become one of the outstanding figures of his century, a leader of

¹ Glas explains: "So they observe the feasts of charity, the washing of one another's feet, and the Christian salutation, or kiss of charity, which, however ridiculous it may be to many Christians, they find no less than five times expressly enjoined in the New Testament." Works, IV, 246-247.

² This custom caused the Glasites to be known as the "Kail Kirk."

³ Vide *The Unlawfulness of Blood-eating*: Works, Vol. II.

religious revival not unlike Wesley, but he was ensnared by the pitfalls which beset ecclesiastical and doctrinal particularism, thus repelling many who otherwise would have followed him in a great venture of faith and service. In Scotland it was reserved for the Secession and Relief Fathers, and later the Haldanes, to become the leaders of evangelical revival. Hill Burton well describes Glas as "a man of peculiar and remarkable abilities, but they had not that uniformity with the tone and tendency of the popular mind which is necessary in the founder of a great sect, or the leader of a large religious body."¹

¹ *History of Scotland* (1689-1748), II, 345-346.

